RICE UNIVERSITY

Narco-Narratives in Mexico and the U.S

Span. 453

Monday 6-8:30 pm

Rayzor Hall 302

Spring 2017

PROFESSOR: Manuel Gutiérrez

OFFICE: Rayzor Hall 333

OFFICE HOURS: Tuesday/Thursday 4:00–5:00 pm or by appointment

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In this course we will study "Narco-narratives" in twentieth century Mexican and U.S. literature, film, music and art. "Narco Narratives" refers to a dispersed but interrelated corpus of cultural mediations that focus on the drug trade and on its violent effects on society.

Through these literary and visual materials, this course will explore the conflict between politics and the ethics of representation in contemporary Mexico and the United States. Do "narco narratives" contribute to understanding the complexity of the violent phenomenon of the drug trade or do they sensationalize and thereby contribute to the proliferation of modernity's cruelty? To answer this question, we will study the effects of neoliberalism on local economies with flourishing and active drug trades with the aim of understanding in broad strokes the political economy of the drug war that was waged in Mexico starting in 2006. Our aim is to understand the cultural production that is an expression of these transformations. First, we will identity some of the traits of the most commercially successful Narco-narratives. Second, we will study how these Narco-narratives either reinforce the mythic status of narco violence that has been perpetuated by the mainstream media on both sides of the border or whether it provides an alternative view of this discourse. Finally, we will look at a few texts that articulate a necessary, critical and subversive view of the official discourse on drug trafficking and its related organizations in both countries.

LEARNING GOALS

Reading critically requires the acquisition of a special set of skills. In this course we will practice identifying works by historical period, writer and style, and then move on to study the way texts (i.e. novels, films, chronicles, etc.) address the society in which they were created. In this way we will engage with the political, historical and cultural content and context of these works. Students are expected to study the novels presented in class and to be able to engage these in critical discussions that will be aided by the reading assignments. Therefore, the completion of all readings is mandatory and students must be prepared to discuss them in class. Some of our goals are as follows:

- Become Conversant in the history of US and Mexican "Drug Wars".
- Understand how historical events influenced the creation of Narco narratives.

- Develop the ability to discuss and argue the issues raised by these texts as they pertain to of nationality, community, rights, liberty, and power.
- Understand the effect the war on drugs has had on marginal communities, especially on women, children, migrants etc.
- Learn strategies for analyzing, synthesizing, and responding to transnational culture.
- Improve ability to communicate correctly and effectively in writing and in speech, taking into account audience and purpose.

Primary Books (Please Purchase immediately)

Watt, Peter and Roberto Zepeda. *Drug War Mexico: Politics, Neoliberalism and Violence in the New Narcoeconomy*. (Zed Books, 2012)

Herrera, Yuri. *Kingdom Cons/Trabajos del Reino.* (Excerpts will be provided).

Alarcón, Orfa. *Fierce Bitch/Perra Brava.* (Excerpts will be provided)

Rascón Banda, Víctor Hugo. *Contrabando.* (México: Planeta, 2008).

Bolaño, Roberto. *2666: A Novel.* (Picador, 2009).

Martínez, Óscar. *The Beast: Riding the Rails and Dodging the Narcos on the Migrant Trail.* (Verso: Icaría, 2014)

Winslow, Don. *The Power of the Dog.* (New York: Vintage, 2006).

Critical Sources

Secondary Readings will be posted on Owl Space.

POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS:

ATTENDANCE

Every student is permitted two unexcused absences. All subsequent absences will result in points being deducted from your participation grade. More than four absences will be docked directly from you *final* grade in the course. Consistent or extreme lateness will also affect your participation grade. Absences may be excused at my discretion for valid reasons (including major illness, emergency, and university-sponsored sports/travel), but you must contact me *before you miss class*. If you miss class, no matter for what reason, it will be your responsibility to fin out what you missed. I will not provide summaries of missed class content. You should seek a classmate's help and ask that they keep you informed of anything you may have missed.

PARTICIPATION

You are expected to be an active class participant. Education does not mean passively listening to and acquiring facts. It is a process of becoming fluent in new ideas and discovering your own thoughts and values. You cannot do this in silence—you must question, hypothesize, and argue. To receive full participation credit in this class you must: consistently take part in our class discussions, be respectful of other's opinions, respond to your classmates' ideas (rather than just waiting for your turn to talk), and engage thoughtfully in peer review.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

Please be "present" in class by not using anything with a screen—no laptops, tablets, or phones. The point our class is not to transcribe what's being said but to listen and participate. You must bring pen and paper for jotting down new ideas and participating in in-class activities. You must also bring a printed copy of the day's reading with you to every class meeting. If you consistently fail to have the reading with you, this will affect your participation grade.

THOUGHT PAPERS

In this class you will write regular response papers as we try to understand how narco-narratives interact with society. The thought papers are designed to help you think about the readings, jump-start class discussion, and build toward the longer essays. If you put some mental energy into your thought papers, you should have no trouble participating in class and getting started on your longer essays.

ESSAYS

You will write three longer assignments this semester. In topic they will focus on Narco-Narratives. In form and style they will build in complexity. In the first essay you will compare and or contrast a novel and a specific narco-corrido or narco-hip-hop song. In this essay we will be focusing on your clarity, style, concision and rhetoric.

In the second essay you will conduct research and properly summarize and synthesize the sources you have consulted. This will be an exercise in critical writing as your aim will be to contextualize a work of literature and address the way it engaged with society. What were its objectives? Who was the novel addressed to? What clues can you find in the novel to support your argument? Etc.

The final essay will bring all of these skills together as you will make a critical and persuasive argument comparing a contemporary Mexican or American novel with a film or collection of poetry or a piece of journalism. Which of these two mediums, in your opinion, worked most effectively in communicating the violence of narco war? Is it appropriate to fictionalize the violence? This piece of criticism will encourage you to judge whether the author accomplishes what her work purports to communicate or reinforces mainstream stereotypes.

PRESENTATION

Throughout the semester each student will give two presentations. Further instructions will be provided.

GRADE DISTRIBUTION

15%	Oral Presentation
10%	Participation/Peer Review
15%	Thought Papers
15%	Essay 1
20%	Essay 2
25%	Essay 3

GRADING SCALE

98-100	A +
92-98	A
90-92	A –
88-90	B +
82-88	B
80-82	B –
78-80	C +
72-78	C
70-72	C –
68-70	D +
62-68	D
60-62	D –
0-59	F

CENTER FOR WRITTEN, ORAL, AND VISUAL COMMUNICATION

You are encouraged to make appointments with the peer consultants at the Center for Written, Oral, and visual communication for your assignments in this course. These consultants do not proofread or edit your work, but they will provide feedback on topics such as the organization of your paper or presentation, the coherence of your argument, appropriate sentence structure, and grammatical errors. You can make an appointment on the Center's website: www.cwovc.rice.edu.

DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES

Any student with a documented disability seeking academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with me during the first two weeks of class. All discussions will remain as confidential as possible. Students with disabilities will need to contact Disability Support Services in the Allen Center. For more information you may also visit the DSS website: https://dss.rice.edu

RICE HONOR CODE

One of the purposes of FWIS is to help new students understand the Rice Honor Code and, more explicitly, to teach students the rules of paraphrasing and scholarly attribution, and appropriate uses of different types of evidence. In this course we will address these issues in detail. However, all students will be held to the standards of the Rice Honor Code, a code that you pledged to honor when you matriculated at this institution. If you are unfamiliar with the details of this code and how it is administered, you should consult the Honor System Handbook at http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~honor-system-handbook/. All academic work must meet the standards set forth in the university's honor code. Any failure to adhere to these rules and guidelines will be met with the application of punitive measures in accordance with university policy.

Plagiarism includes copying or using a resource without proper citation (to include appropriating the ideas of another person without accrediting the source).

You are expected to do the actual writing of all your assignments on your own with no outside help from anyone. However, you are strongly encouraged to collaborate on all other aspects of your coursework with other students; including discussing assignments, reading each other's work, and making suggestions for editing and revision.

SYLLABUS AND OWLSPACE

This syllabus is tentative and instructor reserves the right to change it as the course develops and as I grow to understand students' needs and strengths. You will be informed well in advance if any changes are made to the syllabus. Please review any notices you may receive from Owl Space.

COURSE SCHEDULE

DATE	**Class Activities**	**Readings**	**Writing Assignments**	**Oral Reports**
Jan. 9	Introduction to Course: What are Narco Narratives? What is Narco culture? TOPIC 1. DRUG TRAFFICKING IN MEXICO — HISTORY AND BACK GROUND.	Watt, Peter and Roberto Zepeda. *Drug War Mexico: Politics, Neoliberalism and Violence in the New Narcoeconomy*. (London: Zed Books, 2012) Chapter 1 pgs. 1-25. Chapter 2 pgs. 26-52.		
Jan. 16	MLK			

DATE	Class Activities	Readings	Writing Assignments	Oral Reports
Jan. 23	TOPIC 1. CONTINUED & TOPIC 2. NARCO-CORRIDOS AND NARCO-HIP HOP IN MEXICO AND THE U.S.	Watt, Peter and Roberto Zepeda. *Drug War Mexico: Politics, Neoliberalism and Violence in the New Narcoeconomy*. (London: Zed Books, 2012) Chapters 3 pgs. 53-87 and Chapters 5 pgs. 132-169 Ramírez-Pimienta, Juan Carlos. *Cantar a los narcos: Voces y versos del narcocorrido*. (México: Planeta, 2011) Chapter 3. "Los Tigres del Norte y el resurgimiento de un género," pps. 84-120. See *Narcocultura* (2013) Herrera, Yuri. *Kingdom Cons* (*Trabajos del Reino*). (México: Periférica, 2011.) Pgs. 1-63.		

DATE	Class Activities	Readings	Writing Assignments	Oral Reports
Jan. 30	TOPIC 2. CONTINUED	Herrera, Yuri. *Kingdom Cons* (*Trabajos del Reino*). (México: Periférica, 2011.) Pgs. 64-127 "The State and the Caudillo: Legitimacy in Yuri Herrera's *Trabajos del reino*." Rafael Acosta Morales Latin American Perspectives March 2014 41: 177-188		
Mar. 6	TOPIC 2. CONTINUED	Alarcón, Orfa. *Perra Brava/Fierce Bitch*. (México: Planeta, 2013) Pgs. 1-75. Alarcón, Orfa. *Perra Brava/Fierce Bitch*. (México: Planeta, 2013) Pgs. 76-155. Listen to: Cartel de Santa and El Exterminador See *Miss Bala* (Film w/subtitles) Poemas – Los Muertos Antígona González		

DATE	Class Activities	Readings	Writing Assignments	Oral Reports
Mar. 20	Topic 3. COUNTERHEGEMONIC NARCONARRATIVES IN MEXICO AND THE U.S.	Rascón Banda, Víctor Hugo. *Contrabando*. (México: Planeta, 2008). "In the Crossfire: Rascón Banda's *Contrabando* and the 'Narcoliterature' Debate in Mexico." Esch, Sophie. In *Latin American Perspectives*, March 2014. *El Infierno/Hell* (Film w/subtitles)		

DATE	Class Activities	Readings	Writing Assignments	Oral Reports
Mar. 27	Topic 3. COUNTERHEGEMONIC NARCONARRATIVES IN MEXICO AND THE U.S.	"Imagining the U.S.-Mexico Drug War: The Critical Limits of Narconarratives." Zavala, Oswaldo, in *Comparative Literature* 66:3 2014. Bolaño, Roberto. *2666: A Novel* (Picador, 2009) - "The Part About the Crimes" Pgs. 443-526 Bolaño, Roberto. - "The Part About the Crimes" Pgs. 527-609 Bolaño, Roberto. "The Part About the Crimes" Pgs. 609-692 The art of Teressa Margolles		

DATE	Class Activities	Readings	Writing Assignments	Oral Reports
April 6	Topic 3. COUNTERHEGEMONIC NARCONARRATIVES IN MEXICO AND THE U.S.	Bolaño, Roberto. "The Part About the Crimes" Pgs. 692-711. "Bare Life in Ciudad Juárez: Violence in a Space of Exclusion." Stephen Eisenhammer Latin American Perspectives March 2014 41: 99-109 See *Heli* (Film w/Subtitles) Martínez, Óscar. *The Beast: Riding the Rails and Dodging the Narcos on the Migrant Trail.* (Verso: Icaría, 2014). Excerpts/Dispatches See *Jaula de Oro/The Golden Cage* (Film w/subtitles)		

DATE	Class Activities	Readings	Writing Assignments	Oral Reports
April 13	Topic 4. COUNTERHEGEMONIC NARCONARRATIVES IN THE U.S. (WAR AND DRUGS)	Winslow, Don. *The Power of the Dog.* pgs. 3-98. Winslow, Don. *The Power of the Dog.* 101-232. Colleen W. Cook, "CRS Report for Congress: Mexico's Drug Cartels" "Narco-Propaganda in the Mexican 'Drug War': An Anthropological Perspective," Howard Campbell.		

DATE	Class Activities	Readings	Writing Assignments	Oral Reports
April. 20		Winslow, Don. *The Power of the Dog.* 235-371 John Ross, "Behind the Mexican Drug War" <http://www.sfbg.com/politics/2010/03/15/behind-mexican-drug-war> Winslow, Don. *The Power of the Dog.* 375-542. Gary Webb, *Dark Alliance: The CIA, the Contras, and the Crack Cocaine Explosion* pp. 125-269 The Art work of Rigoberto Gonzalez Ayotzinapa y los 43 Antígona González		